

# Hardcore Vegans

## Veganism in the London Punk Scene

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I dedicate this to everyone who opposes cruelty and dishonesty.

# Introduction

In the fall of 2015, while visiting a friend in North London, I came upon a text which immediately caught my attention. “‘Nailing Descartes to the Wall’: Animal Rights, Veganism and Punk Culture’ (2014) is a zine – a small-circulation work self-published with a do-it-yourself (DIY) ethic<sup>1</sup> – that asserts there is a strong connection between punk and “animal rights activism/vegan consumption habits”. The authors, Len Tilbürger and Chris P. Kale, employ a grounded theory approach in the only detailed research of this connection in the United Kingdom and conclude that animal rights constitute one of a number of intersecting engagements resonant in punk and “underpinned by an anarchist political philosophy”. While I had been aware of the peculiar connection between punk and veganism for many years – having become first a vegetarian, then a hardcore punk enthusiast, and then a vegan – my experience of hardcore punk did not suggest an engagement with anarchism. Rather, I found that many ‘hardcore vegans’ were also adherents of straight edge, a movement entailing abstinence from alcohol and other recreational drugs.<sup>2</sup> Thus I began to consider producing my own study of ‘punk veganism’ as part of my bachelor's degree in sociology in order to challenge Tilbürger and Kale's claim and explore some aspects of my own identity. This would best be done in a narrower setting and I felt the natural choice to be London, the birthplace of punk, where I already had experience with the scene. Soon, a general research question took shape: What is the significance of veganism in the London punk scene?

This question reflects my strong personal interest but it also has a broader sociological relevance. There is an established practice within the discipline of engaging with the ‘deviant’ strains of society and networks of people who maintain uncommon views and practices are especially significant. My approach to sociology is particularly influenced by that of Howard S. Becker (1998), a key proponent of this practice. Becker represents a tradition of striving to discern how other people make sense of the world in order to understand how they contribute to its constant transformation. In the case of punks and vegans this is especially resonant because their views and practices are often directly concerned with the state of society and the way that it *should* be transformed. That by itself is suggestive of how punk and veganism are connected and indeed punk has been associated with a range of socio-political convictions, as noted by Tilbürger and Kale. This makes it an exciting area of study and one well-suited for qualitative work by a researcher who already has intimate experience with the

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1 The DIY ethic is discussed in the third chapter.

2 I had also been drug-free at the time I developed a passion for punk.

punk mindset. Such experience, however, also implies a personal and political bias which I strive to be reflexive of. Beyond being my object of study, punk and veganism also motivate and inform my work and this makes it highly subjective.

Despite its significance, there has been little research into the area. The original punk explosion of the 1970s has attracted much academic and popular attention but subsequent punk faded out of view despite its lasting vibrancy. Very few studies of 21<sup>st</sup> century British punk exist and no studies beside Tilbürger and Kale's zine focus on its connection to veganism. The only such studies have been done in the United States (Clark 2004; Cherry 2006/2015) and Sweden (Sandgren 2000). Aside from these, I refer to some works on punk history and culture, including straight edge. Conceptually and methodologically, my work is further informed by the approach of Becker (1998) and Nick Crossley (2015). Crossley, my supervisor for this project, has analysed the original English punk and post-punk movements as 'music worlds', a concept he adapts from Becker as an alternative for 'subcultures'. I borrow from both world and subculture to develop my own concept of music scene suitable for studying contemporary punk.

The 40 years of development which separate the setting of Crossley's research and my own should be considered. As Crossley outlines, punk first emerged in London and New York City in 1975/76 and became a national phenomenon in England by 1977, receiving mainstream media coverage. Despite the popularity of many bands, punk generally emphasizes independent activity and it spawned underground scenes which maintain a global presence. In the UK, it splintered into three distinct movements after 1977: post-punk, which went 'beyond' punk in experimentation and eclecticism; street punk, based in working-class populations; and anarcho-punk, spearheaded by the band Crass, which developed punk's anti-authoritarianism by endorsing a cohesive anarchist ideology (Liptrot 2015). Anarcho-punk introduced a number of political issues into punk, including animal rights, and some anarchist punks adopted veganism. Meanwhile in Washington D.C. and California, there emerged by 1980 hardcore punk, based around music that was faster and more aggressive than original punk rock and a visual aesthetic that was more down-to-earth than the eye-catching provocation of British punks (Haenfler 2006). Straight edge developed in hardcore in the early 1980s and also became connected to veganism. At the same time, British street punk and anarcho-punk had also become associated with particularly fast and aggressive music, sometimes also described as hardcore. Eventually, US-style hardcore took root in the UK as well, bringing straight edge with it. Contemporary British punk comprises a variety of sub-styles descended from these movements and this fragmentation is felt especially strongly in London.

The nature of the contemporary London punk scene is a major concern of my work, as there is no existing academic discussion of it. It is probably the largest and most diverse urban punk scene in history, comprising a number of distinct sub-scenes, some with very little mutual overlap. This is of course a challenge for my research as it makes it very broad in scope and means that my conclusions cannot be applied to the entire scene. However, this challenge is also exciting and stimulating, giving me space to develop my own approach to analysing such a scene. The 10 recorded interviews I have conducted have provided me with insight into various sub-scenes. They are the result of purposive snowball sampling enacted through contacting various groups and individuals and visiting various punk places, so that some of my participants are connected in networks while others are not. Analysing the similarities and differences between their experiences has allowed me to produce a detailed answer to my research question as well as suggestions for future research into punk scenes.

This text is structured in the following way. I first discuss the few relevant existing studies and the usefulness of the concepts they put forward. I then outline my concept of music scene before going into detail on my methods, describing my sampling, interviews, and data analysis. At last, I present my findings: first I indicate how my participants understand punk, veganism, and the connection between them; then I make relevant observations on the nature of the contemporary London punk scene; and finally I discuss in detail the significance of veganism in the scene, also in relation to other prominent convictions. I argue that despite its fragmentation the scene is characterized by a shared set of values, emphasizing freedom and equality through the DIY ethic. This ethic informs the activities that constitute the scene, which strive to be independent from wider British society and to challenge dominant social norms. Instead, the scene normalizes a number of radical convictions, including veganism, which are respected and encouraged rather than marginalized. Other such convictions, including anarchism and straight edge, interact with veganism and are informed by the same values, but its significance in the scene has grown beyond an association with any of these.

# Existing research on punk veganism

As I have indicated, punk in the last three decades has drawn little academic interest in spite of its global presence and aptness for sociological study. In the UK there is a particular contrast between the extent of punk scenes and the extent of literature addressing them, which is extremely limited. The few existing works relevant to the intersection between punk and veganism mostly focus on American hardcore. In the 2006 book *Straight Edge: Hardcore Punk, Clean-Living Youth, and Social Change*, Ross Haenfler details the development of straight edge after 1989, including an increasing focus on veganism. Two studies from the 1990s present ethnographic research into hardcore: Susan Willis (1993) focuses on North Carolina while Darrell D. Irwin (1999) investigates Long Island straight edge. Aside from these, I am also informed by an excellent 2015 collection of essays titled *Fight Back: Punk, Politics and Resistance*, which emphasizes the lasting importance of punk and covers issues such as: the tension between post-modernity and authenticity in punk (Gololobov); Crass and early anarcho-punk (Webb); the DIY ethic in contemporary British punk (Liptrot); punk lyrics as critical discourse (Schröter); and the evolution of zines (Grimes & Wall).

As for studies that directly consider punk veganism, the earliest is Torgny Sandgren's 2000 Swedish-language article 'Rock i Rörelse'.<sup>3</sup> Sandgren engaged in long-term participant observation of the 1990s Umeå hardcore scene and notes that it is predominantly vegan straight edge and its bands see music and politics as inseparable, making animal rights the central issue of their critique of society. He argues that it is best conceptualized as a 'new social movement' (NSM), because it is non-hierarchical and oriented on issues of rights rather than class.<sup>4</sup> He describes it as fuelled by a collective identity developed at concerts through the physical expression of audiences (e.g. stage-diving) and the political expression of bands in lyrics, speech, and written material. Thus, he concludes, entertainment and political activism form two sides of the same coin, which has helped Umeå hardcore spread animal rights concerns among Swedish youth. Some of these lucid observations echo in my own setting; London punk is not as coherently politicized as Umeå hardcore and cannot therefore be conceptualized as NSM, but an emphasis on political mobilization through music is vital.

Umeå, alongside Skellefteå, is also the setting of a 2003 study by Christel L. Larsson and three others titled 'Veganism as Status Passage: The Process of Becoming a Vegan Among Youths in Sweden', based in interviews done between

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<sup>3</sup> 'Rock and Social Movements: Hardcore, Straight Edge, Veganism, and the Animal Rights Movement'

<sup>4</sup> Sandgren uses Alberto Melucci's (1991) definition of NSM.

1997 and 1999 with 3 male and 3 female vegans aged 16–20. It conceptualizes the titular process in terms of internalization as ‘secondary socialization’. Most of the participants first came into contact with other young vegans at hardcore shows but also named a variety of personal influences and none were straight edge. The study proposes that there are 3 types of vegans: ‘conformed vegans’ follow the dominant views of their social group without being convinced of them; ‘organized vegans’ strongly identify with vegan ideologies and engage in collective animal rights activism; and ‘individualistic vegans’ are most comfortable in their choice and do not identify with other vegans. Conformed vegans will either abandon the lifestyle or become one of the other two types, which may also shift over time. Although not every vegan can be neatly assigned to these categories, all three are evident in punk scenes. The authors’ analysis of becoming vegan is sound and informs my own work.

The earliest American study of punk veganism is Dylan Clark’s 2004 work ‘The Raw and the Rotten: Punk Cuisine’. Clark draws on his “participant-observation in the Black Cat Café in Seattle from 1993 to 1998” as well as a variety of zines and other punk material. Notably, the background of the social group is not hardcore but American anarcho-punk. According to Clark, the vegan café aimed to create a space outside of corporate and state control and the punks who gathered there understand anarchism as “a way of life in favor of egalitarianism and environmentalism and against sexism, racism, and corporate domination” to which their diet is central. They avoid processed industrial products which they see as the embodiment of capitalist alienation and neo-colonialism, preferring ‘de-commodified’ food bought directly from farmers, self-produced, stolen, or re-claimed from garbage. They reject meat-eating also because they associate it with conventional views of masculinity and whiteness. Their diet is also politicized by direct association with activism, such as the Food Not Bombs movement which provides free vegan food to poor and homeless people.

Although Clark’s claims are not always credible – also because he is very sympathetic to the lifestyle he analyses – they are thought-provoking and useful. Clark emphasizes that eating is a universal human activity and therefore a key site in which differences in worldview are embodied. He envisions punk veganism as lived opposition to established values, a deliberate ‘othering’ of oneself to signify solidarity with all that is disempowered and alienated: animals, the poor, nature, non-whites, women. Through this, he suggests that diet is not only linked to every other aspect of punk politics but central to how they manifest in everyday life. When approached critically, this argument forms an excellent basis for understanding the significance of veganism within punk.



Consequently, it is not surprising that it strongly influenced another work, Julie Sylvestre's 2009 study 'Veganism and Punk – A Recipe for Resistance'. Sylvestre also deems food a key site of shared meaning and echoes all of Clark's principal arguments. She asserts that diet is a popular way in which punks achieve a feeling of authenticity and that punk veganism is "quasi-religious" because it is based around ritualized practice expressing shared beliefs on how life itself should be understood. She further stresses that punk is aware of itself as a global phenomenon – as punks across different towns and countries communicate through zines and the internet – and engages with global issues. These claims, however, are not backed in any social research except Clark's and this undermines their validity. Describing punk veganism as quasi-religious without demonstrating any actual contact with vegan punks is particularly questionable.

By contrast, a more practical analysis is presented in Elizabeth Cherry's 2015 article 'I Was a Teenage Vegan: Motivation and Maintenance of Lifestyle Movements'. This is Cherry's second article on this topic, following 'Veganism as a Cultural Movement: A Relational Approach', published in 2006 and based on interviews with 24 vegans from south-eastern US aged 18–52, 11 of them involved in hardcore scenes. Veganism is described here as a 'cultural movement' since most vegans are not affiliated to any organisation as members of a conventional social movement would be. Cherry argues that to maintain veganism individuals generally require a supportive social network, which is why the hardcore vegans were much stricter in their diet.

'I Was a Teenage Vegan' is basically an extension of this work, based on the same interviews and inspired by further experience of punk scenes in the US and Europe which Cherry describes as participant observation. She shifts her terminology, conceptualizing veganism as a 'lifestyle movement' – a term borrowed from Haenfler et.al. (2012) – to emphasize that it is based around everyday choices. She describes punk as a subculture but notes that it does not match earlier definitions of the concept and is closely related to lifestyle movements, and that she is 'extending' these concepts to reflect her data. Her participants defined punk as an effort to be independent through the DIY ethic and have a positive impact on society. Her central argument is that the 'mechanisms' of adoption and retention of veganism should be analysed separately. Adoption is preceded by 'learning and reflection' – which can be initiated by involvement in punk – and each vegan has a story of how they adopted the lifestyle which often includes a 'catalytic experience'. Retention depends on social support, so that vegans are much more likely to retain the lifestyle if they know people who provide them with tools to expand their vegan

practice and identity. In punk, they can find this support as well as opportunities to play in vegan bands, give out food, and produce zines and ‘cookzines’, which may in turn motivate others to adopt and retain veganism.

I agree with Cherry's approach to concepts, particularly in using the definition of punk given by her participants. Her analysis of the adoption and retention of the lifestyle is sound and especially the emphasis on the ‘stories’ and the ‘tools’ of veganism informs my own work. Her description of hardcore as providing essential social support to young vegans suggests that punk may have far-reaching significance to the vegan movement. Interestingly, it contrasts with the argument made by Larsson et.al. that individualistic vegans are most likely to stay vegan for life. Cherry suggests the opposite: people who identify as vegan individually rather than collectively struggle with maintaining vegan practice. Her punk participants match the description of organized vegans, whose veganism is more active but less stable according to Larsson et.al. This contrast may be accounted for by the difference in research settings but perhaps the problem lies in the limited sample on which both studies base the argument. In my experience, organized vegans can stay active for decades while individualistic vegans can make up for a lack of social support with determination. Furthermore, the boundaries between the two categories are blurry, with some vegan punks displaying characteristics of both.

At last, I consider the only detailed study of veganism within British punk, the zine which sparked my own interest in the topic. “‘Nailing Descartes to the Wall’” by Tilbürger and Kale was self-published in 2014 and distributed through anarchist outlet Active Distribution.<sup>5</sup> The authors assert that punk has a considerable impact on animal rights activism as one reason for why it should not be overlooked in academia. They analyse interviews conducted from 2013 to 2014 as well as zines and other material from contemporary British punk scenes, employing a grounded theory approach to give maximum space to the experiences of participants and their own. They acknowledge their closeness to the object of study and commitment to total liberation,<sup>6</sup> asserting that punk ideology is inherently anarchist in opposing a number of intersecting ‘oppressions’. However, they argue that many punks see animal exploitation as the most important issue, highlighting punk's overlap with animal rights activism which manifests in benefit gigs and the prevalence of punks and ‘ex-punks’ in anarchist organizations. They propose that punk can both introduce people to animal rights and encourage them to be more active and aware of intersectionality with other issues. They go on to discuss nuances and potential

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<sup>5</sup> Run by Jon Active, one of my own participants.

<sup>6</sup> An anarchist movement that upholds animal rights and environmentalism.

pitfalls of punk veganism, noting that some anarchists may prefer 'freeganism' (the reliance on de-commodified food described by Clark).

Tilbürger and Kale makes a strong case for the significance of veganism within punk and of punk within animal rights activism in the UK. Their discussion of the tensions that play out in the overlap – between intersectionality and a specific focus, committed and conformed vegans, individualism and collectivism, isolating and inclusive tendencies, and diet and activism – is fruitful, far surpassing the limited consideration these are awarded in other studies. Since the authors demonstrate such deep awareness of the ambiguities of punk, it is a shame that they claim anarchism to be the key to understanding punk veganism. Anarchism accounts for the introduction of veganism into British punk and continues to fuel its association with animal rights activism. However, opposition to oppression is not exclusive to anarchists and many vegan punks have no engagement with anarchism whatsoever. Its importance should not be overlooked but neither should it be generalized and overstated as it is here, perhaps due to the authors' desire to make a clear statement with the study. Nevertheless, I am sympathetic to their anarchist approach to methodology. Like Tilbürger and Kale, I consider the experience of my participants and myself the only limit to my work and openly acknowledge its political nature.

# Methodology

## **Ethical considerations**

My arguments centre on issues that are often both political and personal in nature, related to actual desires of transforming society on both my part and the part of my participants. Nevertheless, all were open to discussing these issues and gave informed consent for my work with the data produced, including the usage of quotes. They have been aware that their involvement is voluntary and able to reach out to me with concerns at any time. Their identities are protected by pseudonyms, with the singular exception of Jon Active who stated that he does not see a reason for being kept anonymous. I strive to represent their views and experiences as authentically as possible, frequently employing direct quotes to this end. However, the arguments of this study are mine and shaped by my own bias. Punk and veganism carry a deep personal and political significance for me and affect my identity and worldview. Therefore, I am susceptible to overstating the value of punk and and I strive to limit this. Nevertheless, it would be absurd to claim objectivity in the work that I am doing and I emphasize that my findings should be read critically.

## **Music scenes**

My approach to theory, informed by Becker (1998), is generally inductive rather than deductive so that I allow the concepts I use to be transformed through my research and analysis. My very definitions of punk and veganism as well as hardcore, DIY, and animal rights are based in those given by my participants. However, I am also informed by published works, especially in the use of certain concepts that tend to arise in sociological discussion of punk and veganism such as identity, norm, discourse, authenticity, and alienation. I further refer to some theory proposed or highlighted in existing studies of punk veganism as outlined above. Nevertheless, I employ every concept critically, considering its usefulness in describing the experiences in which my work is based and adjusting it when necessary. This approach is well suited to a research area which has been mostly overlooked. Although the work of Clark (2004), Tilbürger and Kale (2014), and Cherry (2015) forms a solid basis for understanding the significance of veganism within punk, I develop a new conceptualization that fills gaps in their conclusions and reflects my unique research setting.

In line with this approach, I propose a new concept of music scene suitable for studying contemporary punk. My principal source is the 2015 book *Networks of Sound, Style and Subversion* in which Nick Crossley introduces ‘music worlds’, a concept based in Becker’s ‘art worlds’, employing it in a mixed-method analysis of

the original English punk and post-punk movements. He discusses the concept of subculture, which has dominated academic discussions of punk since being brought to prominence by the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) and describes networks of working-class youth characterized by a distinct and consistent identity based around musical orientation, style, activities, and territories. Their style – comprising dress, argot, and ritual – demonstrates resistance to alienation and domination by challenging established conventions. However, punk is not essentially working-class, as asserted by Willis (1993), Sandgren (2000), and Cherry (2015) in relation to hardcore and by Webb (2015), who argues that in early anarcho-punk working-class and middle-class identities blended rather than reinforced. Crossley demonstrates that original punk was also thus mixed; so are some branches of the contemporary London punk scene. Furthermore, theories of subculture give little consideration to music-making, as if music was simply there and not shaped by subcultures. Hence, Crossley turns to a concept which makes music a central focus. ‘Worlds’ were popularized by Herbert Blumer to describe social spaces in which new ways of understanding arise. For Becker, art worlds comprise: networks of artists, supporting personnel, and audiences; places; conventions; and resources. This model allows Crossley to produce a comprehensive account of early punk and post-punk.

I borrow from both subculture and world but retain the most natural term, scene, widely used to describe communities of people brought together by a common interest. Crossley argues that this term is unsuitable for academic use because it means different things to different people, but I find this flexibility valuable. It suits inductive analysis of contemporary music scenes since they already reflect on themselves as such, punk scenes being especially self-aware in this respect. My concept is informed by experience of various music scenes in England and Czechia but especially my research in London and aims to be both straightforward and suited for in-depth study. Any such scene is constituted by social *activity* revolving around a particular *interest*. In the case of punk, the primary activity is the production and reception of punk music, most importantly at live shows, but writing, arts and crafts, food, and activism are also significant.

Activity is made possible by *structure*, which comprises networks, places, and resources, as emphasized by Becker. Networks are what holds the scene together; if a person listens to punk music but remains isolated from others who do, they are not part of it. Places are where activity happens and networks develop. In the case of punk the key places are venues, but also shops and cafés, community centers, and recording spaces. Scenes are based in towns where locals can meet regularly and range in size from the London punk scene,

composed of numerous sub-scenes, to a tiny punk scene developed by Victor's group of friends in Oxford in the mid to late 2000s.<sup>7</sup> However, they are also linked across territory so that we can speak for instance of the Manchester punk scene as well as of the Northern, British, European, and global punk scene. Such links have grown much stronger in the 21<sup>st</sup> century due to developments in travel and the internet – which creates ‘virtual’ places – and are reinforced by festivals; Fluff Fest in Czechia, for example, brings together hardcore communities from around Europe. Organized activity requires resources, accessed through networks. Their distribution reflects power relations within these networks but the centrality of the DIY ethic makes these less apparent in punk.

A scene's activity reflects and develops a certain set of *values*, relating to a shared way of understanding the world and finding meaning in one's life. They are what sets the scene apart from wider society and in the case of punk this is reinforced by the fact that its values exist in conscious contrast with perceived negative established values. They are communicated – both internally to signal a collective identity and externally to signal the scene's existence – through a certain *aesthetic*. This aesthetic fulfils the role of subcultural style but also manifests in everything that is produced by the scene and is constitutive of the interest that it revolves around. The punk aesthetic is expressed both in the lifestyle of punks and in punk music itself, as well as through visual design. At a punk show, it is everywhere; in the sound, the objects that constitute the venue, and the appearance and speech of the band and audience. Although the aesthetic of the contemporary London punk scene is very diverse, it is universally characterized by a ‘raw’ quality.

It should be noted that there is also what Noah calls the “animal rights and veganism scene”. Cherry (2015) describes veganism as a ‘lifestyle movement’ and notes that hardcore could also be understood in this way, while both Sandgren (2000) and Liptrot (2015, pp.234–5) describe punk as a new social movement (NSM). Accordingly, Dan asserts that punk is by comparison to rock and metal “less a genre of music and more of a political... social movement”. Thus we can think of punk and veganism as two overlapping scenes or movements. A thorough conceptualization of veganism, however, is beyond the scope of this study. What I focus on is punk veganism, peculiar to networks of vegans who share engagement in punk scenes.

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7 “some pubs ... used to let us play and... little towns [in] Oxfordshire, they had bands playing, get them to come down and their group of friends would come and... it wasn't growing [although] we tried making zines and stuff and handing out free CDs and selling CDs in record stores”

## **Sampling, interviews, analysis**

To explore veganism in the London punk scene using only my personal resources, I conducted unstructured interviews with a small sample of vegans active in the scene. Such a qualitative approach produces data limited in scope – so I cannot claim that my findings are representative of the entire scene – but rich in detail. When used to study music scenes, it allows for a deeper analysis of values than structure. Small samples are strongest when assembled through what Becker (1998, p.86) terms theoretical or purposive sampling; consciously searching for the most interesting ‘odd’ cases which challenge existing assumptions. For me these would be vegan punks diverse in characteristics such as age and history of participation, focus and interest, gender, and cultural background. To find them I mostly employed the snowball sampling method, accessing a few people with knowledge of the scene and asking them about potential participants, then repeating this process over and over. Originally I planned to conduct, transcribe, and analyse 5 interviews of 30–60 minutes. I ended up carrying out 10 recorded interviews of 45–80 minutes and analysing in detail four.

My interviewing method aimed to give maximum space to the views and experiences of my participants while covering every key dimension of the topic. Every interview involved discussion pertaining to three research sub-questions:

- How do vegans active in the scene understand and live veganism?
- How do they understand and relate to the scene and punk more generally?
- What other convictions do they associate with punk and veganism?

To gather data suitable for answering all of these, I followed a very loose structure. I always started by asking participants about the origins and evolution of their engagement with punk and veganism in the first part of the interview. From there the conversations unfolded naturally, but I made sure to ask for: details of their experience of the London punk scene; definitions of punk, veganism, and other key terms that came up; details of their approach to veganism, especially the interplay between its personal and social dimensions and the role of animal rights activism; their opinion on why and how punk and veganism are connected; and their views on various convictions that may be associated with punk veganism. I updated the specifics of my method over time, for example in asking more often about squatting in later interviews.

I could have well chosen Manchester (where I have been studying) or Prague (where I have lived for most of my life) for my setting, as both cities have well-established, vibrant punk scenes. I chose London mainly due to its long-standing status as a place of great diversity and innovation. Indeed, London is where British punk was born and a key site of its later evolution, as well as the location



of the UK's largest vegan population. I believed it to be especially prominent in contemporary punk due to prior experience of events and bands based there. Furthermore, I have close friends with more extensive experience of the London punk scene who were the starting point of my sampling. Three of my participants – Dan, Alex, and Victor – are musicians that they know. They also told me of potential groups to contact and places to visit.



The Black Cat Café in Hackney where I found myself with a surprise focus group, interviewing Hugo, George, and Leo. The café operates an anarchist book-store (right), supplied by Jon Active who I was put in touch with by Hugo afterwards.

Hence I contacted various bands, shops, record labels, venues, and individuals through Facebook, email, or their websites, asking whether there were potential participants among them. I started with less than 10 contacts but those who replied often told me of others to ask and thus the snowball effect came into play. I arranged my first three interviews for late January 2017 and completed my last three over Skype by March. I also spoke to two vegan punks active in Manchester who provided me with additional insight into the differences between the scene in London and elsewhere. I visited various punk places throughout London in the course of the project, reaching participants from diverse ends of the scene. While Jon came out of the original 1980s anarcho-punk scene, Alex runs a hardcore and post-hardcore label and has no links to any of my other participants, most of whom also play in hardcore or crust punk bands.<sup>8</sup>

My 10 recorded interviews were on average 60 minutes long, providing me with a wealth of data to analyse. I transcribed the interviews with the Black Cat crew,

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<sup>8</sup> Crust is a brutal form of punk that emerged in mid-1980s England.



Jon, Victor, and Noah of vegan band Carnist – 4 hours 15 minutes total – and took notes from the other recordings. I split each transcript into 12–15 sections based on specific topics; each, for example, included a section in which straight edge was discussed. I then re-read them several times, noting recurring themes within each one and then comparing them and looking for additional sub-themes, also in light of some of the propositions made in earlier studies. This formed the basic structure of my discussion which I then refined and filled in with details and quotes from the transcripts and the notes from the other interviews. This method allowed me to give maximum space to the accounts of my participants while developing a structured argument.

# Findings

## **Punk and veganism**

Punk is a very abstract term that goes far beyond music and has different meanings for different people. Although not all of my participants would describe themselves as ‘punks’, they all appreciate music that they describe as punk and have been active in punk scenes.<sup>9</sup> As a fairly diverse group of people they also defined punk in different ways. There are however commonalities in their understanding. Crucially, all associate punk with freedom and independence – critical thinking, authentic expression, autonomous community – and see the DIY ethic as a way of maintaining it. This ethic pertains to self-supporting activity not motivated by profit, including the production and distribution of music. It is further linked to the value of equality which they also see as central to punk. All believe that a person should be able to actively contribute to punk scenes regardless of wealth, gender, sexuality, nationality, and ethnicity. If anyone can be respected as a musician or organizer – as all of my participants have been – punk is generally non-hierarchical and this is reinforced by a shared anti-authoritarian attitude. Its libertarian and egalitarian values distinguish punk from wider society and indeed all see it as an alternative and a challenge to dominant social norms and structures.

The DIY ethic is essentially anti-capitalist in rejecting money as a primary resource and objective, making up for it in time and energy. As Victor asserts in relation to starting a record label, “you don't really need money, you just need to have the drive to do it”. Money is still an important resource but my participants believe that the activities which constitute punk scenes should not be motivated by profit to remain independent. Noah states: “if your motivations become about personal gain and profit, then ... life is already saturated with all that, there's plenty of that already ... punk music is a refuge from that kind of capitalist ideal”. Like Noah, Amelia also describes punk as an escape from “rat race meritocracy” and Leo sees it as an “outlet of frustration” for young people. Despite associating punk with alienation and an “outsider attitude” they believe that this can and should translate into something positive; for Amelia, punk is about “fostering an environment in which you feel positive, creative, energized, useful”. Nevertheless, punk energy often translates into a form of protest. Jon Active asserts that from the first “punk music was about being angry and ... putting your rejection into music”. Thus, many see punk as inherently political and consider it important to be outspoken, for example in lyrical expression.

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<sup>9</sup> Amelia, for example, says the label feels “archaic” to her. Punk scene is discussed above.

My participants disagree on what music can be considered punk. Harry and Amelia describe punk music as an umbrella term for any DIY music that demonstrates punk values. Anything between indie pop, heavy metal, reggae, and folk may be considered punk if it is produced with a punk attitude.<sup>10</sup> However, for others such as Noah “there has to be a [certain] level of aggression and abrasion ... for it to qualify as punk or hardcore music”. Both him and Tomas mention musicians who combine the DIY ethic and political lyrics with an acoustic sound but whereas Tomas asserts that they are making punk music, Noah does not. On the other hand, music with a noisy guitar-driven punk sound may not be considered punk if it lacks key values. As concerns popular musicians motivated by profit, most criticize them but do not go as far as to say their music is no longer punk, merely that it is not the kind of punk they want to engage with. Many assert that punk music is about having something to say, with Dan calling it “a vehicle for getting [a] message across” and Harry stating that its value lies in inspiring people to stay true to their convictions.

Furthermore, many of my participants focus on hardcore. Hardcore scenes may sometimes be seen as separate from punk scenes and their adherents described as “hardcore kids”. Tomas distinguishes hardcore from punk, seeing the former as oriented less on politicized activity and more on music and image. Jon dislikes the vocal style of hardcore for being so aggressive that lyrics may not be audible, because he believes this contributes to “people [not] actually [paying] a lot of attention to lyrics anymore”. Like Tomas he sees in hardcore a herd mentality, with people “wearing the uniform of hardcore and taking on the uniform of hardcore politics”. Most however see punk and hardcore as inseparable, with Noah stating that “hardcore is just a kind of punk ... to say that I don't like punk but I like hardcore is ludicrous”. Another contentious form of punk is post-hardcore, which combines the aggression of hardcore with post-punk experimentation. It generally lacks direct political expression and is lyrically abstract and personal.<sup>11</sup> However, Victor believes that it is still informed by punk values although they are expressed in a more indirect way. He argues that “you can still be political and personal in the same line” by reaching out to people who go through mental struggle. Alex echoes this, believing that one should write about things that they feel they have something to say about which may well be emotional rather than political issues.

All of my participant are ethical vegans who avoid animal products because they are compassionate to non-human animals and believe that they cannot be treated as commodities. These sentiments are made clear by Noah: “I think if

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<sup>10</sup> There is much musical crossover between punk and all of these genres, most extensively metal.

<sup>11</sup> The screamo subgenre particularly emphasizes emotional expression.

we're in a position to reduce the suffering of others then we have a responsibility to fulfil that ... I am aware of the... reality of suffering, that which we share with all life, and if I can... be healthy and happy without contributing to that suffering, then I have a responsibility to do that ... anyone who has any kind of relationship with animals, whether it be watching birds in the park or having a pet cat, can acknowledge the presence of suffering and the enjoyment of freedom. I think if you are aware of those things you can't justify eating and using animals as products.” Many see animal exploitation as one of the greatest existing evils due to its scale; Amelia highlights the meat and dairy industries, stating that “mass murder makes [her] upset.” Most associate their veganism with animal rights, the conviction that the essential interests of animals must be protected. They all feel that the vegan lifestyle is healthy and enjoyable, with Dan calling it “completely positive”. For many it also comprises respect for the natural environment, which is being devastated by animal agriculture. However, Hugo notes that health and the environment are tangential concerns, animal rights being the central one.

My participants feel that it is natural for punk and veganism to overlap because they are characterized by a similar mindset. For Jon punk involves questioning what is wrong in society and choosing to live in a different way and veganism is one such choice. Like him most find that it does not make sense to take a stand against injustice and overlook animals who are exploited to the utmost extreme. Will notes that a person who is anti-authoritarian and cares about the well-being of others will be attracted to both punk and animal rights. He and Dan agree that both are characterized by “going against the grain” and “thinking outside the box”. Amelia highlights the values of compassion and respect as central to her understanding of both punk and veganism, noting that veganism can also be informed by the DIY ethic. Victor, who states that “if it weren't for punk [he] would definitely not be vegan”, argues that both offer a coherent and positive identity to young people who feel alienated in society. I would argue that punk is fundamentally concerned with “the presence of suffering and the enjoyment of freedom” which Noah notes as what makes animals worth protecting. Therefore, there is credibility to Clark's (2004) argument that a vegan diet may serve as everyday expression of punk values. Additionally, many recognize the importance of their historical connection; Will asserts that the presence of animal rights in punk is the legacy of anarcho-punk bands Crass and Conflict.

### **The London punk scene**

The role of history in discussing punk veganism is reinforced in London, which was central to the original anarcho-punk scene and the activities of Crass and Conflict. Jon became interested in anarcho-punk in 1981 and vegan in the

mid-1980s after linking up with other anarchist punks. He went to London in 1989 and moved into a squat in Stoke Newington that was “full of vegans who were very dogmatic”. He helped establish another squat nearby called Lee House, which served as a community centre with a vegan café and food coop; although short-lived he describes it as a landmark in North London veganism, with outreach beyond the punk scene. Jon asserts that the key division of the scene was initially between politically conscious punks and those who “didn't care about anything”, associating the latter with street punk. The former were linked through a “similar political outlook” rather than sound and some focused on crust punk. However, Jon also associated some crust squats with a “nihilist drinking culture” and drug abuse, while straight edge only emerged in the 1990s with the “American influence with the hardcore scene coming in”. Hardcore was also associated with veganism but Jon feels that straight edge vegans tended to be more militant while lacking actual commitment. He sees hardcore as contributing to a rising emphasis on music over lyrics so that differences in values became less and differences in sound more important. By the late 1990s the internet also came into play, making the scene larger but by extension more fragmented and diluted by drawing new audiences to different sub-genres. Nevertheless, it has continued to be politicized. From the 1990s, Jon was in a group of mainly anarchist ex-squatters who wanted to establish a stable community centre. They did not succeed but some started around 2004 Pogo, a vegan café which was by 2014 replaced by the Black Cat. The Cat is run by people with a background in straight edge hardcore – including Hugo – and Jon notes this as a convergence of the two punk vegan traditions.

At present, the London punk scene is extremely large and diverse. In a snowball effect, this draws ever more punks to it; 10 out of my 12 participants moved to London from elsewhere. Victor believes that due to its size it is impossible for the scene to be unified and Noah contrasts this with early 2000s Northern hardcore which stretched across Sheffield, Manchester, Liverpool, and Leeds and “shared [its] gigs with the street punks and the crusties and... the metalheads”. He notes that like him his girlfriend “identifies as a punk, as... into hardcore, but [they] don't like any of the same bands, like [their] whole communities have been completely separate”. To Leo there “seems to be quite a divide in UK hardcore between like the more straight up hardcore bands and the more crusty punk bands” but George “wouldn't say there's even [these] 2 scenes, there's probably 6 or 7” including ones oriented on post-hardcore and grindcore. Will agrees that there is division between hardcore – including a straight edge scene – and crust in London while noting the lasting presence of conventional punk and ska punk. Tomas describes his own band as straight edge crust and notes that this positions

it on the border between two sub-scenes. He describes the London punk scene as split between political crust, old-school punk, “macho hardcore”, conventional hardcore, and “hipster punk”. The last may be associated with post-hardcore and “modern hardcore” which Alex assigns to a distinct sub-scene sustained by record labels Holy Roar Records and Truthseeker Music.

Nevertheless, sub-scenes are not neatly divided along musical lines and may instead revolve around places which engage with a range of styles, such as the TChances Arts & Music Centre in Tottenham. Due to the size of London, locality plays a role in who frequents what places, but most assert that sub-scenes are not based in specific areas. A full account of the scene's fragmentation is beyond the scope of this study, which rather considers its consequences. The important question is whether key values are universally shared. Victor argues that the important division is between people committed to the DIY ethic and those interested in commercial success.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, he suggests that macho hardcore and bands that are “aggressive for no reason” are naturally alien to more conscious punk. Tomas is even more sceptical about unity of values; he highlights the hatred his band Hello Bastards receive for their pro-Palestine stance, asserting that many punks are only committed to free expression of agreed-upon views. In my opinion, such tendencies should be scrutinized and combated, but I am more optimistic about the potential for unity in the scene. Despite coming from diverse contexts and focusing on different styles including hardcore, crust, post-hardcore, anarcho-punk, and ska punk, all of my participants demonstrate a shared set of values.

Nevertheless, many feel that the scene lacks in politicized activity. It is seen as one of the best in the world for bands, with Victor asserting that it is so vibrant because “everyone wants to put on bands and everyone wants to go to bands”. However, most believe that the end-focus should not be on music and especially that band worship should be avoided. The scene should most of all be an active community capable of embodying and inciting social change. Tomas argues that the punk aesthetic is irrelevant unless it inspires political engagement. Crucially, London is seen as lacking what Jon calls “cool places” where communities can come together. A huge blow in this regard came with the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 which made squatting in residential buildings a criminal offense. Punk is now mostly limited to venues, which are good for shows but less so for other activities and may not be committed to the DIY ethic. Tomas, Will, and Hugo agree that punk scenes are more politicized in mainland Europe where cool places are more frequent.

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<sup>12</sup> Dan, however, believes it is good if there are widely popular bands who spread convictions such as veganism.

DIY Space for London in New Cross, however, is seen as improving the situation by providing just such a place. Some feel that it goes even further by encouraging diversity in terms of genres, activities, and people. The fair that I visited there offered not only hardcore but also electronic, indie, and hip hop records. Live shows demonstrate similar crossover and the community centre also hosts various meetings, workshops, and other events. Furthermore, it is intent on being inclusive in terms of gender, ethnicity, sexuality, and ability. Will – who regrets that there is a lack of cooperation between DIY Space and TChances, which in his experience is not as politically active – connects this to a recent rise of intersectionality in the scene wherein people engage with a wider range of social issues. Leo, George, Victor, and Amelia all highlight DIY Space's “first timers” project, which encourages people who have never been in a band or played a particular instrument before and especially those who are disabled, queer, non-white, and female to learn and perform for the first time.



TChances (left) and DIY Space (lobby, right) are major punk community centres for North and South London, respectively. At DIY Space I interviewed Victor of Don't Care Records and my only female participant Amelia of Joey's Kitchen at a record and literature fair.

The project aims to combat a lack of diversity in the scene, which Noah asserts is made up of “on the whole, straight white males, middle-class males you know, able-bodied...” This description can also be accurately applied to my own sample. Although some observe that feminism is on the rise, women remain a minority in the scene and doubly so among musicians. In respect to class, my participants are from mostly middle-class backgrounds but express a lack of concern for social status and some sub-scenes are seen as fairly mixed. There are also divisions in terms of age; Will believes that younger people are more attracted to crust and hardcore whereas older people prefer conventional punk. Furthermore, the great ethnic diversity of London is not reflected in the scene. Both Jon and Amelia, however, note that the city's international make-up has been felt, with Jon stating: “in the squat scene, in the campaign scene I've been involved in, I'm

often one of the few English people ... which is great”.

Internationality relates to the situation of the scene within punk more widely. My participants mention connections to other British cities as well as a range of European countries and the US. These are facilitated by travel but reinforced on the Internet and many see virtual places in a very positive light. Dan, who “went vegan because of the Internet”, believes that digital technology has made music “the most DIY it has ever been” because “you can record an album in your bedroom and have it sound decent and then spread it on the Internet”. He finds this to be especially beneficial for punk music which is concerned with message rather than profit. Similarly, Jon notes that independent organization has become much easier and his anarchist outlet Active Distribution now exists as a website. Leo would not have got his job at the Black Cat and thus become much more active in punk and veganism had he not seen an add on Instagram. However, the Internet is also subject to concerns. Jon avoids using Facebook – likely the most significant platform of online communication between punks – because he considers its commercial nature irreconcilable with the DIY ethic. He argues that it is not a free platform, for example in banning atrocity images which have been significant to punk political expression. He similarly sees Amazon as the “epitome of capitalism” that EMI was in the 1980s. Jon believes that punks should make their own independent websites – as they would make zines – in order to minimize the potential effects of censorship, propaganda, and surveillance on their online activity. He also argues that it should always be linked to “real activity” as online campaigns may serve as a mere distraction. This is echoed by others who feel that although the Internet has made punk bigger, it weakens local communities where real activity can happen. Even Dan notes that at the same time as punk spreads online it is suffering “on the ground” where independent venues struggle to survive.

### **Veganism in the London punk scene**

Veganism is undoubtedly much more common in the punk scene than it is in London as a whole. A May 2016 report by the Vegan Society indicates that less than 2% of London's population is vegan. Judging from 20 years of experience of the scene since the late 1990s, Will believes that perhaps 20% of the people involved are vegan and only about 50% eat meat. This estimate is of course unreliable, but it corresponds with the experience of everyone I have spoken to. In some sub-scenes, I would expect the numbers to be even stronger. Predominantly vegan scenes are not unheard of; Noah asserts that in early 2000s Northern hardcore most people were straight edge, “if you ate meat it was really strange”, and at one point there were more vegans than vegetarians.



Furthermore, my participants agree that it is impossible to be involved in the scene and not be aware of veganism – with Victor stating it appears “on the surface of punk, consistently” – and that even those who eat meat generally respect vegans and sometimes eat vegan food. Some note that veganism has gained mainstream recognition in the last few years and vegan options are constantly becoming easier to find in London. However, Jon and Harry reminisce that it was common in the scene even in the 1990s when it was still extremely marginal in wider society.

I argue that veganism is prevalent because the scene normalizes it. Leo states: “whereas in normal walks of life, people might get defensive about their veganism or they might be on the attack, people in hardcore I think it gives them some kind of confidence to talk about it, to not be on the attack and just be open and positive about it”. This confirms Cherry's (2015) argument about the supportive networks and tools of veganism found in hardcore scenes. People are much more likely to be vegan if they engage with a community where veganism is common, because they are shown the lifestyle as realistic and positive and given access to vegan resources. In the punk scene this is further amplified because everyone involved identifies with punk and those who see this identity as correlated with veganism – for whom a vegan diet embodies punk values – motivate others to be vegan. Leo notes the importance of discovering that veganism was not just for “hippies”: “when I saw that there was vegans involved in things like hardcore which is something I really enjoyed growing up ... these people I consider to be like cool and liking the things I like ... it opened my mind to it a little bit more than before because I felt no relation to these other people I saw being vegans.” Similarly, Victor states: “[punk] triggered it in my head ... also because of these bands I loved so much at the time I was like I look up to these people ... they're playing this music and have these diets I was like ‘maybe there's something in this’.”

Veganism is primarily advocated in writing and speech but it is also encouraged through sharing food. Leo describes this as “quite a humble thing, like, when you make a load of food for people they ... see it as a really giving act”. Similarly, Amelia believes that the most effective way to promote veganism is to “make vegan food normal” and Victor notes that “people who put on shows will cook vegan food, because ... then everyone's going to eat it” and “the people who eat meat aren't gonna come in like ‘fucking hell there's only vegan food today’”. Alex highlights that touring bands tend to eat vegan, as did his former band Hang the Bastard although most of the members were meat-eaters. This directly connects veganism to the activities which constitute the punk scene.

Interestingly, a normalization of veganism potentially contrasts with punk's emphasis on critical assessment of established norms. Indeed, Tilbürger and Kale (2014) see this as a major point of tension, noting that a tendency to police adherence to veganism may alienate people from it. Jon resolves this in arguing that “it goes two ways because [of] the whole thing about political punk police or... vegan police and people being really fucking authoritarian about what can be allowed here ... that can get really problematic and negative, but... I personally think it's well worth drawing lines and saying this is what we're about”, rather than “fuck you I'll do whatever I want”. Thus he suggests that although individualism is key, norms allow shared values to survive and both are negative in their extreme. He sees veganism as worth protecting, criticizing “festivals which have loads of fucking meat catering”.

However, the significance of veganism in the scene must not be overstated. The concern about a lack of politicized activity discussed above applies to this area as well. Tomas, who has been active in the scene for about 15 years, believes that veganism has grown weaker within it and is much stronger in other scenes. Hugo simply does not think it is “that present in ... the hardcore scene in the UK” and George agrees that it “seems to be on individual levels”. They note Repentance and Carnist as two recent outspokenly vegan bands but both have gone inactive as of 2016. Similarly, Will asserts that his band Active Slaughter is rare in the scene in addressing animal rights. My participants may also overestimate the presence of veganism because they are more likely to know other vegans. Leo states: “...now I've come to London I seem to have gravitated towards people who are like-minded, so that almost all my friends are vegan, which is really great”. Hugo follows up by observing that “it's a bit of a bubble ... sometimes, you just disconnect, you go to a squat party, thinking everything is gonna be vegan and suddenly there is something not vegan and it's kind of a surprise.”

Since their veganism is active and social, my participants generally fit the category of organized vegans proposed by Larsson et.al. (2003). Over half have jobs that consist of selling vegan goods and all have been active in the punk scene through playing in bands, organizing shows, working on zines, running record labels etc. These punk and vegan activities are often linked; for Hugo, “cooking vegan food is very much related with hardcore and punk”. Furthermore, some take up animal rights activism, a central concern in Tilbürger and Kale's study. Tomas sees animal liberation and human liberation as inseparable and asserts that it is essential for vegans to go beyond diet and actively campaign for it. Will believes that many punks are animal rights activists but that their activism generally happens outside of the scene. An exception to

this are benefits, events that raise money for a specific activity. Jon has organized benefit shows and attended demonstrations for a range of causes while Hugo mentions benefits done at the Black Cat for Food Not Bombs, Hunt Saboteurs, and Antifa. Hunt sabotage seems a particularly popular form of direct action. It was a focus for Jon in the mid-1980s and is a regular engagement for Dan, who states that “animal rights is a huge part of [his] life”. Nevertheless, the most committed activist is Will, who was imprisoned over his involvement in the Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty (SHAC) campaign. He has also campaigned against fur use and attended anti-fascist and peace demonstrations.

### **Related convictions**

Direct action against animal exploitation, hunger, and racism such as some of my participants have engaged in is often associated with radical left-wing and anarchist politics, and indeed Will, Tomas, and Jon all identify as anarchists. Their anarchism is left-wing in being anti-capitalist and intersectional; it opposes every form of exploitation of humans, animals, and the environment, a philosophy sometimes known as total liberation. However, it should be noted that Crass, who pioneered this approach in punk, strongly rejected association with left-wing politics – including the socialism of the Clash – which they saw as counterproductive and reproducing authority (Webb 2015, p.107–8). Although most of my participants demonstrate a set of views roughly consistent with total liberation, I challenge Tilbürger and Kale's claim that the “connection between animal rights/veganism and punk culture ... is best understood in conjunction with anarchism”. This might have been accurate in the 1980s but the situation is more complex now. It is important to note that anarcho-punk as a genre has essentially died out and – aside from old reformed bands, who according to Jon “are just doing it [to] get loads of adulation and it doesn't fucking mean much at all”, and some anarchist crust and hardcore bands – Active Slaughter, formed in 2000, are among the only anarcho-punk bands around.

Leo notes that “in the UK scene a lot of people who seem to be vegan are left-wing...” but George does not believe “there's any strong, ideological kind of backing to it, so... I don't think anyone would necessarily call themselves socialist or... anarchist... they have that separate from the traditional political beliefs.” He states: “definite ideas in politics seem to be on a decline, so I think that's mirrored in punk...” Noah mentions that people he knows “identify quite clearly as anarchist and engage with it on an intellectual and active level and that's totally fine” but says of himself: “I don't identify as an anarchist or a socialist... that requires a lot of thought and research and ... I haven't ever heard, sort of, enough to make me think that I'm completely comfortable with that as a label for

myself. I'm very comfortable with the label of vegan and punk and feminist and straight edge". This confirms a notion which made me question Tilbürger and Kale's assertion in the first place, that contemporary punks tend not to uphold any specific system of political thought. Although the values of freedom and equality which they share are also at the core of anarchism and socialism, most identify with more specific views and movements. Nevertheless, all of these have historically been associated with either anarcho-punk, straight edge, or both. The significance of any movement changes over time, with Jon observing: "we have waves ... paradigms of what is the latest thing we care about."

Of the most universal punk convictions is anti-capitalism, which informs the DIY ethic as discussed above. Jon is probably the most committed anti-capitalist, having "kept active on account of what [he considers] to be important ethical things in terms of DIY and non-corporate, non-commercial... just doing things without losing their spirit by selling them out to other interests". He argues that although "punk has been pretty much totally consumed by capitalism" as even protest becomes a commodity, "if people make an effort they can buy things from other outlets ... independent outlets... the alternative economy is not such a great thing because in a way it's just a mirror image of the economy and we need a way to destroy it altogether but in the meantime and maybe as a way of training or showing that alternatives are possible ... ideally go and shop from your local coop". Anti-consumerist sentiments are echoed by others, for example as a key lyrical theme of Dan's former band, and seen by Willis (1993) as central to hardcore. None of my participants, however, are committed to freeganism to the same extent as the Seattle punks of Clark's (2004) study.

There is a vibrant anti-fascist movement in the scene, which Leo believes is linked to veganism as both Repentance and Carnist had supported anti-fascist causes. Many share a concern voiced by Jon that "the right wing is developing in across Europe." Anti-fascism is informed by anti-racism and anti-nationalism, which are shared by everyone I have come into contact with in punk. Jon, Victor, and Dan however assert that hidden strands of radical right-wing punk still exist. Jon accounts: "[the] hardcore Nazi scene went underground, cause they were getting such a trashing from AFA and from that reaction and also ... a lot of punks who weren't necessarily part of groups would just say you know 'you're not playing, we're playing' ... [but] other bands appeared without making it too obvious what they're about ... dodgy bands, which aren't necessarily skinhead but are kind of very right-wing and they're out there at the moment kind of sneaking into the street punk scene, sneaking into the punk scene". Victor believes that "there's tonnes of labels that put out just like white supremacist

stuff” but argues that such music cannot be considered punk because it opposes core punk values. Dan tells of a vegan shop in London whose owner allegedly dated a fascist punk, noting how surprised he was at such a connection.

Anti-nationalism – expressed by slogans such as “no borders, no flags” which can be found on punk clothes and stickers – is closely linked to anti-imperialism, another common conviction. Jon denounces the UK for “a sick fucking history of privilege, based on the fucking empire, based on exploitation, based on slavery ... that's where so much of the pig ignorance which dominates this country and its... horrible kind of smugness comes from ... it's still in a lot of people's heads, and that whole thing, you know, exploiting peoples and exploiting animals: same thing.” Anti-nationalism is also linked to anti-war sentiments, which were central to initial anarcho-punk according to Jon. He asserts that nuclear weapons were seen as the greatest global threat at the time, before climate change became a major concern. Currently, however, there does not seem to be a significant movement against either in the scene, although both war and environmental destruction are addressed by various bands and environmentalism to some extent informs punk veganism. The set of ‘anti’ convictions present in the scene can be topped off by anti-religion. Nearly all are atheists and those who are anarchists particularly see organized religion as a tool of oppression.

There is currently a strong movement for “gender recognition and equality” noted by George and Leo as embodied in the non-gender toilets of DIY Space for London.<sup>13</sup> Carnist particularly combined outspoken feminism and veganism and Noah states: “intersectionality is really important, you know feminists should be talking about animals, animal rights people should be talking about feminism ... it's the same foundation that these issues are a kind of coming from ... I think talking about animal rights and veganism is very uncomfortable for a lot of people because it requires you to question your own behaviour, and I think – it sounds cynical – but I think it's easier to talk about racism”. What he suggests is that punks should discuss difficult issues rather than focus on expressing what they already agree on. This is an important point, echoed by Tomas who finds especially in hardcore a limiting tendency to “preach to the convinced”.

At last, let us consider straight edge, which has been central to the connection between veganism and American hardcore. Hugo asserts that in the UK, straight edge has been weaker than in some other parts of Europe and “doesn't necessarily mean to be vegan [whereas] in other scenes it's very much related.” As mentioned above, some associate straight edge hardcore with tendencies

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<sup>13</sup> There is one room with cubicles and another with urinals.

such as machismo, lack of individualism, and undue focus on bands and image. The stereotype is of someone who gets a vegan straight edge tattoo and later abandons the lifestyle. Noah in particular finds that “some of the attitudes in that community can be quite negative”. However, the significance of the drug-free lifestyle in the London punk scene stretches beyond any sub-scene, in spite of a strong presence of alcohol and other drugs. Noah, Dan, Hugo, and Tomas are all straight edge despite each having a very different focus. Jon has been drug-free throughout his adult life but never identified as straight edge and notes that this is the case of many in the scene, as does Amelia.

For Noah, straight edge is “not important in the same way that veganism is” but they are connected through “living consciously and living with a sense of responsibility... in a way which sort of celebrates and protects life”. Others agree that straight edge is much more personal than veganism but that there are commonalities. Dan and Alex believe that both improve one's physical as well as mental well-being, with Alex arguing that it therefore does not make sense to be straight edge and eat meat. Dan feels that both require critical assessment of established ideas, one being that animals are ours to use and the other that you “have to get smashed to have fun”. Furthermore, Victor notes that both demonstrate a refusal to buy from “corporations which benefit and grow from harming” as reinforced by the fact that many alcohol and tobacco products are not vegan. Finally, those who are anarchists see drugs as an instrument of social control. Specifically, Jon accounts that he has been to “thousands of benefit gigs in venues in London” and “at every one of those events, way more than [was raised] was spent on alcohol ... and the money is not just being wasted, it's also going to you know corporations which we're not really meant to be supporting.” Therefore, although veganism and straight edge are not as strongly linked in London as they are elsewhere, there is significant interplay between them as they are informed by the same set of punk values.

# Conclusion

A connection between punk and veganism may perplex an outsider who associates the former with nihilism and the latter with esotericism, but the more one grows familiar with them the more probable it should appear. Punk is a unique phenomenon, a domain where fun and politics go hand-in-hand and where anger and alienation translate into creativity. 40 years since its original formation, which initiated punk's global expansion and left a permanent mark on British music and culture, the London punk scene is the largest it has ever been. It is also the most fragmented, as punk music has evolved to encompass styles ranging from brutal metallic hardcore to borderline indie pop. It comprises a number of sub-scenes based around such styles as well as different places and networks, some very loosely connected. Nevertheless, there is considerable unity in the scene in terms of aesthetic and values. Adherents of every sub-scene identify with punk and define it through the DIY ethic, which informs the activities that constitute the scene. This ethic is motivated by an anti-authoritarian and anti-capitalist stance and the pursuit of freedom and equality, which is shared throughout the scene and makes it inherently political. Although it is currently seen as lacking in politicized activity, the scene strives to challenge dominant social structures and normalizes a number of marginal convictions.

One such conviction is ethical veganism, which has a strong presence across sub-scenes and is encouraged through discourse and food-sharing. While historically linked to anarchism and straight edge, punk veganism has grown beyond either and its significance in the scene is best understood through direct correspondence to core punk values. Indeed, many vegan punks see animal rights as a natural engagement for punk as both are essentially concerned with resisting oppression rooted in established social norms. A vegan lifestyle and a punk identity may thus reinforce each other, with the former serving as an expression of the latter – as Dylan Clark (2004) argues – and in turn finding in it essential support – as Elizabeth Cherry (2015) proposes. Consequently, not only is veganism a significant feature of the London punk scene, but the scene is also a considerable force within the British animal rights movement, with the potential for large-scale socio-political impact in this area as well as others.

While this argument is a satisfying end-result to my research, there are considerable limitations to it. As I have stated, my work is highly subjective due to my personal investment in punk and veganism. Needless to say, I present both in a very positive light. My conclusions could therefore be attacked as idealizing the London punk scene and the significance of veganism within it. The perspective I

present may be distorted not just by my own bias but also by my limited sample. All vegans, my participants are also likely to overvalue veganism and generally to offer a partial understanding of the scene. Although it has received no academic attention and it was thus instrumental for me to make observations as to its nature, a thorough analysis of the scene would require a broader sample and a mixed-method approach suitable for exploring its structure. While my participants represent various sub-scenes, there are some that I have gained no insight into. Notably, if there is a street punk scene in London it may challenge my assertion of unity of values and the universal presence of veganism. Furthermore, my participants are overwhelmingly male and English and all are white and aged 23–39 (except Jon Active, aged 50). A more diverse sample especially in terms of gender and ethnicity would benefit consideration of how such identities impact the scene. Indeed, my only female participant demonstrated a unique understanding of various issues.

Much of these limitations to my research are issues of scope. Admittedly, I underestimated the size and diversity of the scene that I set out to study. The short-term qualitative research I have conducted would be more effective in a narrower setting, such as Manchester or Prague which I have mentioned as alternatives. In London, it could focus on a specific sub-scene, or compare a few select ones. This would allow for a more focused analysis, informed by a sample diverse in terms of identities rather than interests. Furthermore, participant observation would prove useful for studying the activities which constitute punk scenes in more depth. I may conduct further research into punk, informed by these reflections, in the future. Nevertheless, I cannot regret my choice of research setting as my immersion into the London punk scene has been most rewarding. I only hope that the scene will draw further academic interest; a full mapping out of its sub-scenes would be particularly exciting. I also hope that it will grow stronger and spawn more places where active communities can work towards social change. Studying it has made me quite optimistic about its potential, especially in encouraging inclusiveness and honest discussion.



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40 years after kick-starting the global punk movement, London holds what may be the largest punk scene in existence. Splintered into a number of sub-scenes based around different genres and places but unified by an anti-authoritarian attitude, the scene rejects dominant values and normalizes a range of radical convictions, including ethical veganism. Despite aptness for sociological study, both 'punk veganism' and the London punk scene have received little academic attention and this study aims to fill the void. The few existing works on punk veganism connect it to either anarchism or straight edge hardcore, but I propose that its significance in London has grown beyond either. Employing my own concept of music scene – which highlights activity, structure, values, and aesthetic – in analysing 10 qualitative interviews with vegans engaged in various sub-scenes, I argue that the activities which constitute the scene are universally guided by the DIY ethic, which rejects profit as a legitimate motivation and emphasizes independence and equal participation. The libertarian and egalitarian values represented by this ethic are shared throughout the scene and inform punk veganism, which is directly linked to the scene's activities as vegan food is present at events and animal rights concerns voiced by bands and individuals.